

5 || SOCIAL REVOLUTIONARIES

Between November 1880, when the first social revolutionary club was established in New York, and October 1883, when a major social revolutionary congress was held in Pittsburgh, a revolutionary anarchist movement of considerable proportions took shape in the United States. The new movement made deep inroads into the ranks of the Socialistic Labor Party, attracting many disgruntled members, whose disillusionment with the ballot and opposition to party policies led them to reject political action and adopt a revolutionary program. By the end of 1881, as George Schilling observed, the English section of the SLP in Chicago had dwindled to "a corporal's guard,"¹ while such influential papers as the *Vorbote* and *Arbeiter-Zeitung* had shifted their allegiance to the social revolutionary camp.

Anarchism, during these initial years, had not yet crystallized into a coherent doctrine, nor was the anarchist label in wide use. Yet the social revolutionaries—as they persisted in calling themselves until the mid-1880s—emerged as an unmistakably anarchistic organization, with aims and methods that sharply distinguished it from the evolutionary and politically oriented party from which it sprang. While abandoning the principles of the SLP, however, the social revolutionaries continued to regard themselves as socialists—but socialists of a distinctive type, anti-statist, anti-parliamentarian, and anti-reformist, who called on the working class to abjure politics and involve itself in a direct and final confrontation with capital.

So it was that an independent and avowedly revolutionary socialist movement began its career in America. The formative period of its history was marked by three important events: the London Social Revolutionary Congress of July 1881, the Chicago Social Revolutionary Congress of October 1881, and the arrival of Johann Most in America in December 1882.

The initiative for the International Social Revolutionary Congress, which met in London from July 14 to 20, 1881, had been taken the previous autumn by Most and other European militants with the

ciation on a decentralist and anti-authoritarian basis. Most himself, ironically, did not attend, having been imprisoned a few weeks earlier for applauding in his paper *Freiheit* the assassination of Tsar Alexander II. The delegates, however, included Peter Kropotkin, Errico Malatesta, Louise Michel, and other leading anarchists from many countries. The strictest secrecy was maintained, and the delegates, more than forty in all, were identified by code numbers. Despite these precautions, one of them, a certain Serreaux, was later unmasked as a police spy.²

Although none of the newly formed social revolutionary groups in the United States sent its own delegates to the London congress, three were represented by proxy. The mandates of the Social Revolutionary Club of New York and Social Revolutionary Group of Philadelphia were held by a German anarchist named Carl Seelig, while another German anarchist, Johann Neve, represented the German section of the SLP in New York, which had discarded reformism for revolution without having broken with the party. In addition, a prominent French delegate, Gustave Brocher, represented the Icarian community, a French utopian settlement in Iowa.

Beyond this there were two delegates at the congress who came from the United States but did not, strictly speaking, represent social revolutionary groups. The first, Marie Le Compte, carried the mandate of the "Boston Revolutionists," a group of native workers and intellectuals though she herself was of French origin and styled herself "Miss Le Compte, Prolétaire." An exotic and somewhat mysterious figure, Miss Le Compte, now in her middle years ("nicht ganz junge," as the historian Max Nettlau describes her), had been an associate editor of *The Labor Standard* and an active writer and speaker for the socialist movement, with a special sympathy for outlaws and tramps. To the London congress, on July 15, she delivered what Nettlau calls "a romantic speech about all possible forms of vagabond life in the United States."³ After the congress, she remained in Britain and Ireland and engaged in revolutionary propaganda. At Stratford, in October 1881, she held forth on "The Rebels of the Sea," a paean to pirates. Some months later she journeyed to Spain, France, and Switzerland, continuing her agitational work. Together with Louise Michel, she took part in a "bread riot" in Paris in March 1883. Soon afterwards, she settled in Berne, translated Bakunin's *God and the State* and Kropotkin's *Appeal to the Young*

into English, and then, for reasons which remain obscure, dropped out of the movement.⁴

Even more mysterious was the other American delegate, Dr. Edward Nathan-Ganz, who resembled nothing so much as a character out of Dostoevsky or Joseph Conrad. Although from Boston, like Miss Le Compte, Nathan-Ganz represented the Mexican Confederation of Labor (Confederación de los Trabajadores Mexicanos), which contained both anarchist and non-anarchist members. A facile writer in several languages, he contributed articles to *El Socialista* (organ of the Mexican Confederation), Johann Most's *Freiheit*, and Benjamin Tucker's *Liberty*, published in Boston. Tucker, however, afterwards described him as a "refined and rather fascinating crook."⁵

A shadowy figure whose history is not well known, Nathan-Ganz had traveled widely in Europe, North Africa, and Latin America, come to the United States in the 1870s, and spent several years in Boston, where, in January 1881, he launched an ultrarevolutionary journal called *The An-archist*, the first in America to use that name.⁶ Subtitled a "Socialistic Revolutionary Review," only two issues appeared, the second being suppressed by the police because of the violent nature of its contents, in particular a series on "Revolutionary War Science," devoted to street-fighting and explosives ("We desire peace, the enemy wants war. He may have it, absolutely. Killing, burning—all means are justifiable. Use them; then will be peace!"). Johann Most, a contributor to the journal, later used the same title, *Revolutionary War Science*, for his notorious dynamite manual of 1885, which figured prominently in the Haymarket proceeding. The SLP, firmly opposed to insurrectionary methods, called *The An-archist* a "wild revolutionary magazine" filled with "rules for the construction of barricades and other nonsense."⁷

When *The An-archist* was shut down, Nathan-Ganz was taken into custody and spent two months in a Boston jail.⁸ After his release, he departed for London, where he attended the Social Revolutionary Congress and impressed Josef Peukert, a leading Austrian delegate, as being "the model of an arrogant, insolent fop" (ein Musterexemplar eines arroganten frechen Geckn).⁹ Shortly thereafter he went to the continent, traveling through Holland, Belgium, and France. Returning to England, he was arrested at the request of the Dutch authorities on charges of "obtaining money under false pretenses" in Rotterdam. Extradited to Holland, he spent several years behind bars. His subsequent activities are unknown.¹⁰

At the London congress it was Nathan-Ganz who spoke the loudest for methods of armed insurrection. He urged every group and individual to take up the study of "chemistry and technical science," a euphemism for dynamite and other weapons of destruction. He even suggested the creation of a military school for social revolutionaries, if the necessary funds could be obtained. Because of these recommendations, which coincided closely with those of Serreaux, Nathan-Ganz was suspected of being yet another *agent provocateur*. There is no evidence, however, to support this. Nor were Nathan-Ganz and Serreaux alone in favoring violent methods in the struggle against capital and government. The assassination of Alexander II, occurring earlier the same year, had made a deep impression on the delegates, who adopted a resolution endorsing "propaganda by the deed" and the study of chemistry to bring about the social revolution.¹¹

The chief object of the London congress, however, was to reconstitute the First International on the basis of autonomous federations and groups. The delegates duly approved the formation of such an organization, retaining the old name, International Working Men's Association, but with no central authority save that of a bureau of information. Thus was born the so-called Black International. The new organization became a fearful specter in the eyes of governments throughout the Western Hemisphere, which suspected it of being the directing power behind various acts of assassination and terror committed in the ensuing decades. Such suspicions were utterly without foundation. The International, in fact, never became more than a loose association of independent groups, nor did it ever create a central agency of any type, if only because such a body would have been at odds with the federalist convictions of the participants. Even the information bureau led only a phantom existence and soon faded into oblivion. Nor did a second congress, proposed for the following year, ever meet.

Yet the London congress did have a sequel in the United States. Three months later, in October 1881, a convention of social revolutionary groups assembled in Chicago, the seat of the American movement. It was the first attempt to organize the revolutionary socialists on a national scale, the initiative coming from the New York Social Revolutionary Club and other American groups represented at the London affair. The gathering was not, however, limited

to anarchists. Socialists of all shades who were "weary of compromise and desirous of accomplishing the social revolution by other means than political action" were invited to participate. Applications were to be sent to August Spies, business manager of the Chicago *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, who served as secretary of the convention, or "Congress of Socialists of the United States," as it was officially designated.¹²

Though billed as a "congress," the meeting lasted only three days (from October 21 to 23) and only twenty-one delegates attended, most of them German immigrants. Poking fun at the assembly, the SLP described it as "a baker's dozen of Chicago malcontents and six delegates from outside cities." To Philip Van Patten they were merely a bunch of *agents provocateurs*, sent by the capitalists "to shout revolution and clamor for blood."¹³ Of the fourteen cities represented, nearly all were in the East and Middle West: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Paterson, Jersey City, Jersey City Heights, Union Hill, Hoboken, Louisville, St. Louis, Kansas City, Milwaukee, Omaha, and Chicago itself. Chicago, with four representatives, had the largest delegation: Parsons, Spies, Timothy O'Meara, and Jacob Winnen, augmented by representatives of the Lehr-und-Wehr Verein and Jaeger Verein. Two additional Chicagoans, J. P. Dusey and Peter Peterson, carried the mandates of Paterson and Kansas City, which participated by proxy. Dr. Joseph H. Swain of Boston came on behalf of the freshly launched journal *Liberty*, edited by Benjamin Tucker, and Justus Schwab represented the Social Revolutionary Club of New York.¹⁴

Schwab, Parsons, and Spies played the leading roles at the congress, which assembled in the North Side Turner Hall. After the delegates were seated, Spies, a handsome young German of eloquence and charm, introduced a resolution, approved by acclamation, condemning the British government for its repressive behavior in Ireland. A second resolution, likewise enthusiastically accepted, hailed the populists of Russia for their "unrelenting warfare" against the new tsar, whose father had been killed with bombs earlier that year. The resolution expressed "unqualified support in employing any and all means to extirpate such monsters from among men."¹⁵

Having adopted a militant stance, the congress went on to denounce private property and "wage slavery" and to endorse the decisions of the London congress, upholding propaganda by the deed and other insurrectionary methods of struggle and declaring itself

in favor of "armed organizations of workingmen who stand ready to resist, gun in hand, any encroachments upon their rights."¹⁶ On the question of politics, however, the convention took an equivocal stand. Parsons and Spies, while no longer believing in the efficacy of parliamentary action, continued to regard it as a useful means of agitation. But a resolution to that effect was rejected by a majority of the delegates, who repudiated the "great American superstition" that redress might be obtained through the ballot.¹⁷ At its final session, however, the congress adopted a compromise resolution which recognized the right of each group to determine for itself whether or not to engage in political activity.

As an alternative to the SLP, with its political and evolutionary orientation, the congress founded a new organization, christened the Revolutionary Socialistic Party, with emphasis on "revolutionary" to differentiate it from its reformist rival. The first national anarchistic association in the United States, it was at the same time an American branch of the recently revived International in London and, like its parent body, designed as a loose federation of autonomous groups with an information bureau (in Chicago) as the connecting link. According to the rules of the organization, five members could start a local group, and ten such groups could call a national congress. Each group was to enjoy full discretion in matters of agitation and propaganda, provided its activities remained consistent with the party program. Three papers were selected as official organs of the association, *Vorbote*, *Den Nye Tid*, and *Liberty*, all of which had representatives at the congress (Spies, Peterson, and Swain).

On the last evening, a reception was held to celebrate the establishment of the new organization. Nearly three hundred men, women, and children attended. After a zither performance and singing by the Socialistic Male Chorus and the German Typographical Male Chorus, Justus Schwab recited a poem depicting a contest between the "Money Kings" and "Hunger," in which the latter succeeded in winning the prize—"Liberty." The program closed with the singing of the "Marseillaise," followed by dancing until a late hour.¹⁸

With the holding of the Chicago congress an important step had been taken in the formation of a revolutionary anarchist movement in America. The militant tone of the gathering was to become more and more characteristic of the socialist left in the ensuing years. On the other hand, a coherent organization failed to materialize. Theoretical and tactical differences remained acute, new social revo-

lutionary groups took shape at a sluggish rate, and, as a national coordinating body, the Revolutionary Socialistic Party proved ineffective. Not even the information bureau could be established for many months. Thus did matters continue until the end of 1882. It was only with the arrival of Johann Most that the movement began to close ranks and become a significant revolutionary force.

Of all the major movements of social reform, anarchism has been subject to the grossest distortions of its nature and objectives, and of all the expositors of the anarchist creed, none has been more abused and misrepresented than Most, the German-born revolutionary firebrand, who spent the last twenty-five years of his life in America. Most, it would be no exaggeration to say, was the most vilified social militant of his time. Portrayed in the daily press as a wild revolutionary fanatic, bent on chaos and destruction, he became the cartoonist's stereotype of the bewhiskered, foreign-looking anarchist, with a bomb in one hand and a dagger or pistol in the other, conspiring against rulers and capitalists and taxing the vigilance of the authorities to keep him in check. Most, having served nearly seven years in European prisons before coming to the United States, was to be imprisoned three times on Blackwell's Island between 1886 and 1902. In an editorial published after his death in 1906, the *New York Times* called him a "mad dog" and an "enemy of the human race."¹⁹

That Most was an uncompromising agitator, an apostle of revolutionary violence and propaganda by the deed, cannot be denied. In his booklet *Revolutionary War Science*, published a year before the Haymarket incident, he provided detailed instructions on the manufacture of explosives and the uses to which they could be put in the war of the poor against the rich. And yet he was far from being the rabid, maniacal figure of caricature. On the contrary, he possessed considerable dignity, erudition, and charm. To Emma Goldman, whom he helped convert to anarchism, he was a highly sensitive individual whose sympathy for the laboring poor furnished the mainspring of his revolutionary energy. A gifted orator and journalist, he drafted the Pittsburgh Manifesto of 1883, which became the charter of the social revolutionary movement. His celebrated paper, the *Freiheit*, which he edited for twenty-seven years, acquired a place in the front ranks of German revolutionary literature, and decades after his death his powerful "Hymn of the Proletariat" con-

tinued to be sung by German workers of every radical denomination, in Europe as in America. An indefatigable propagandist for nearly forty years, Most was an international figure whose influence was felt in Switzerland, Austria, and Germany, as well as in England and the United States. When he arrived in New York in December 1882, his legendary reputation had preceded him.

Most had been born in Augsburg in 1846. From his earliest childhood the world seemed to him a vast conspiracy of cruelty and oppression. To begin with, he was born out of wedlock—"contrary to police regulations," was how he himself sardonically put it.²⁰ His father, a former actor and singer, had been reduced to scratching out a living as a government clerk. His mother, a well-educated, liberal-minded governess whom he adored, died of cholera when he was still a small child. This was the first of a series of tragedies that embittered Most's life. His father soon remarried, but the relationship between the boy and his stepmother, "bigoted, coarse, greedy," in Most's description, was one of constant and bitter conflict. To make matters worse, an operation performed on his jaw when he was thirteen years old left him permanently disfigured. In later life he managed to conceal the deformity to a great extent beneath his beard. In the meantime, however, it caused him profound anguish, made him an object of ridicule, and shattered his dream of becoming an actor, for which he was otherwise amply gifted. Indeed, his powerful revolutionary oratory of later years was, in part at least, an outlet for his thwarted theatrical ambitions.

Instead, the unhappy youth was apprenticed to a bookbinder, a man of hardness and brutality. Small wonder that Most should have grown up hating authority "with all my soul." His whole childhood had, as he put it, been a horrible nightmare, leaving him "deeply embittered" for life.²¹ His illegitimate birth, the deformity that made people shrink from him, the cruel stepmother and still more cruel employer had combined to make Most a rebel; and, in some degree at least, his later glorification of violence was his way of making society pay for the sufferings of his youth.

In 1863 Most completed his apprenticeship. The next five years were spent in perfecting his craft. Equipped with his tools, a meager formal education, a love of reading, and an extreme sensitivity because of his disfigurement, he traveled through Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and northern Italy, the victim of insult and humiliation wherever he went. Everywhere he had difficulty in making friends

and finding work. While in Switzerland, however, Most encountered a group of socialist workingmen who showed him the first true sympathy and friendship he had ever known. Embracing their doctrine with all the fervor of a convert, he joined the Zurich section of the International Working Men's Association and began his long career as a socialist agitator. His life had acquired new purpose. "From then on," he wrote in his memoirs, "I began to feel like a real human being. A goal loomed before me which went beyond the mere struggle for existence and the satisfaction of momentary personal needs. I began to live in the realm of ideals. . . . The cause of humanity became my cause. Each step that betokened its progress filled me with the greatest joy."²²

In the fall of 1868, Most left Switzerland for Vienna. He soon attracted notice and became a popular speaker at workers' gatherings. In the summer of 1869 he was arrested and sentenced to a month in prison for making an inflammatory speech. The following year he was condemned to five years on charges of high treason for taking part in a free-speech demonstration. Released after a few months, he set off on an extended propaganda tour. After the outbreak of the Paris Commune in 1871, however, he was banished from the country. Returning to Germany, Most took a leading part in the unfolding socialist movement. During the next seven years he edited socialist papers, was a tireless organizer and speaker, wrote pamphlets and labor songs, produced a popular digest of Marx's *Capital* (which was harshly criticized by Engels), was twice elected to the Reichstag, and spent three years in prison for revolutionary agitation. After the passage of Bismarck's anti-socialist law, Most was expelled from Berlin. Hounded by the authorities, he left Germany in December 1878, never to return.

In company with many another fugitive radical, Most chose to settle in London, where his anarchistic temperament increasingly asserted itself. In January 1879 he launched his famous journal, the *Freiheit*, whose provocative articles and editorials were couched in a graphic, sardonic language that strongly appealed to its working-class audience. Most was a gifted editor, and his paper carried the stamp of his personality. He made no significant contribution to revolutionary theory. His philosophy, a mélange of socialist, anarchist, and Blanquist ideas, seldom went deep. But as a journalist and pamphleteer he had few equals. A polemicist rather than a thinker, he possessed a Rabelaisian wit that rarely missed the mark. Ac-

cording to Marx, the *Freiheit* contained "no revolutionary content" but only "revolutionary phrases."²³ Calculated to agitate, to stir up, to provoke, it seldom inspired quiet reflection.

During 1879 and 1880, *Freiheit* steadily shifted from a socialist to an anarchist publication. By the summer of 1880 it had become the most uninhibited radical paper of the day, preaching the gospel of revolutionary conspiracy and propaganda by the deed. It was because of his growing extremism that Most, along with Hasselmann, was expelled from the German Social Democratic Party. Yet his impatience with piecemeal reform could no longer be contained. He called for the violent destruction of capitalism, the state, and all repressive institutions. When Alexander II was assassinated in March 1881, Most, under the heading "At Last!" published an article in *Freiheit* not only glorifying the act but urging others to emulate it.²⁴ For this he was promptly arrested and condemned to sixteen months at hard labor. On his release, in October 1882, he received an invitation from the New York Social Revolutionary Club to undertake a lecture tour of the United States. He not only accepted but decided to resettle in America, transferring the *Freiheit* to New York.

On December 2, 1882, Most boarded the steamship *Wisconsin* at Liverpool, landing in New York on December 18. The Revolutionary Socialistic Party received him with open arms. On the day of his arrival, the New York Social Revolutionary Club arranged a mass meeting in the Great Hall of Cooper Union, where he was greeted as a hero. At thirty-six he was already a legendary figure, martyred by seven years in prison. The hall was packed to overflowing with socialists and radicals of every type. After speeches of introduction by Justus Schwab and Victor Drury, a refugee from the Paris Commune, Most delivered a powerful address. He forecast an imminent social revolution that would be written with "blood and iron." The audience was spellbound.²⁵

Most's arrival signalled the opening of an energetic campaign of agitation. Immediately after his reception, he embarked on a tour of the East and Middle West. He spoke in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Louisville, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Buffalo, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Chicago. Everywhere he went he was given an enthusiastic welcome. In Chicago, where he spoke on December 28, sharing the platform with August Spies, George Schilling, and Ernst Schmidt, 6,000 eager listeners packed the hall, overflowing the galleries and blocking the aisles. His denunciations of capitalists and

officials who "welded iron chains for the workingmen," his call for the arming of the proletariat and a direct assault on the established order, drew thunderous applause.²⁶

Most was one of the greatest revolutionary orators of his time. In physical appearance he did not at all resemble the wild cartoonist stereotype. Voltairine de Cleyre, on the contrary, found him "courtly in his manners" and the "personification of grace in his movements."²⁷ Small and slender, with blue eyes and prematurely greying hair, he dressed for speaking engagements in a formal dark suit. His hair and beard were neatly trimmed. Only when he began to speak, one listener recorded, did his "fiery soul" reveal itself.²⁸ A brilliant platform orator, endowed with eloquence and wit, he could be emotional or sarcastic, humorous or deadly serious. But he always struck to the core of the matter in language that workers could understand. "He spoke eloquently and picturesquely," wrote Emma Goldman, who heard him for the first time in 1889. "As if by magic, his disfigurement disappeared, his lack of physical distinction was forgotten. He seemed transformed into some primitive power, radiating hatred and love, strength and inspiration. The rapid current of his speech, the music of his voice, and his sparkling wit, all combined to produce an effect almost overwhelming. He stirred me to my depths."²⁹

Most's flaming rhetoric and vision of a free society raised his listeners to a high pitch of enthusiasm. He could enthral with his revolutionary passion even those with an imperfect grasp of the language in which he spoke. Along with Germans and Austrians and Swiss, Bohemians and Jews flocked to hear him lecture. His sharp phrases, noted a Jewish anarchist from the Lower East Side, had the "impact of the bombs and dynamite" of which he so often spoke; and he had only to give the word, so it seemed, and "the audience would rush to build barricades and begin the revolution." "It is an understatement," recalled another Jewish comrade, "to say that Most had the ability to inspire an audience. He electrified, all but bewitched every listener, opponent as well as friend." No wonder the press hated and vilified him, said Voltairine de Cleyre after attending one of his lectures, "for his eloquence is so great that even German policemen against whom he thunders his anathemas, applaud him, using their clubs to pat the wall behind them so as not to be seen."³⁰

In Most, then, the social revolutionaries of America had gained a

formidable propagandist and agitator. More than any other individual he was responsible for the movement's growth. His tour was a stunning success. In city after city new groups sprang up in its wake. It resembled, as the socialist Morris Hillquit put it, "a triumphal procession."³¹ The tour, at the same time, put *Freiheit* back on its feet. Almost at once it took its place as the movement's most influential journal, "shooting flames of ridicule, scorn and defiance."³² Most was untiring in his work of popularizing revolutionary doctrines. He had a knack for simplifying complex theories in phrases accessible to the ordinary worker. Apart from the *Freiheit*, he issued a series of strikingly entitled pamphlets—*The God Pestilence*, *The Property Beast*, *The Social Monster* were among the best known—all of them marked by the same caustic humor and polemical genius that set an inimitable stamp on everything he wrote. Translated into many languages, they sold in tens of thousands of copies and were widely disseminated in both Europe and the United States.

Most, a born revolutionary, had little patience with conciliation or compromise. The depth of his hatred of capitalism made him denounce all partial reforms as mere betrayals. Against the influence of the "money kings, railroad magnates, coal barons, and factory lords," legislation availed nothing. One day, Most declared, the American people would learn "that an end is to be made to the mockery of the ballot, and that the best thing one can do with such fellows as Jay Gould and Vanderbilt is to hang them on the nearest lamp-post." Most's own experience as a lawmaker had convinced him of the futility of political action. A parliament, as he saw it, was nothing but a "puppet show," a game of deception which could never assist in the emancipation of the workers. There must be no temporizing with the existing order, but only relentless war until the "property beast" had been "pursued to its last lurking place and totally destroyed." "Fling aside all patching up and smoothing down, all bargaining and compromising," Most exclaimed. "Extirpate the miserable brood! Extirpate the wretches!"³³

An ardent proponent of direct action, Most maintained that a war of the poor against the rich was the only means of solving the social question. He urged the workers to arm themselves in order to exterminate the "reptile brood," the "race of parasites," as he branded all capitalists and rulers. If the people did not crush their oppressors, he insisted, then the oppressors "will crush the people, drown the revolution in the blood of the best, and rivet the chains of slavery

more firmly than ever. Kill or be killed is the alternative." Most, however, never championed violence for its own sake, but only as a weapon of emancipation. "We are revolutionists not from love of gore," he told an audience in Baltimore, "but because there is no other way to free and redeem mankind. History has taught that. No use of trying reform. The Gordian knot can be cut only by the sword, and within a few years the masses will write the history of the world."³⁴

Most's fiery oratory, his trenchant journalism, his fervent advocacy of revolution won him a large and devoted following. Though temperamental, self-centered, and inflexible, intolerant of opposition or even disagreement, he was the living personification of the social struggle, a "rebel above everything else."³⁵ Since childhood he had learned to hate authority and persecution in every form. Religion, government, and capital, he declared, were "carved out of the same piece of wood: to the devil with them all!"³⁶ Through his speeches, his newspaper, and his tireless agitational efforts, he transformed the social revolutionaries into a coherent and vigorous movement, with a more sharply defined sense of purpose than it had exhibited before his arrival. At the same time, he employed his talents to drive the SLP to the wall. The exponents of political reform seemed tame and colorless beside this apostle of militant action, who held before the workers the exciting idea of complete emancipation as an immediate possibility.

A man of strong and vivid character, a "new Prometheus," as Nettlau calls him, "everlastingly at war with all Olympus,"³⁷ Most quickly established his preeminence over the revolutionary left. From 1883 to 1886 virtually the whole social revolutionary movement was the expression of the ideas and vision of this one man. By the same token, he came to symbolize all that terrified and alarmed respectable American society. The daily press made him the target of abuse. He was vilified, persecuted, and thrown into prison. His hatred of capitalism, some maintained, glowed hotter in him than his love of mankind. Yet, with his forceful personality and bitter eloquence, he served the cause of radicalism as well as many a gentler man.

6 || THE PITTSBURGH CONGRESS

In undertaking his lecture tour of America, Most had a larger purpose than the formation of new social revolutionary groups, important though he acknowledged this to be. As a national organization the Revolutionary Socialistic Party had lain virtually dormant since its creation in October 1881. A strong effort would be needed to infuse it with life, or to scrap it for something more effective. Furthermore, the socialist movement as a whole remained bitterly divided. Revolutionary socialists vied with political actionists, trade unionists, and other elements for the allegiance of the working class. It was Most's aim to unite the various socialist currents—at any rate, those that accepted a revolutionary program—under a common banner.

Preparations were made, accordingly, for a unification congress to be held at Pittsburgh in October 1883, exactly two years after the Chicago congress. Through the Information Bureau in Chicago, established belatedly in April 1883, the "Socialists of North America" were invited to send delegates to the new assembly, the goal of which was to achieve "a uniform, practical and effective organization and agitation."¹ Most set great hopes on this gathering. It must not, he wrote to August Spies, secretary of the Information Bureau, be a repeat of the October 1881 congress, which in Most's view had accomplished little. What was needed, rather, was an "imposing" and "demonstrative" assembly of socialists from all over the country, who would lay the groundwork for an "international, federalistic, and revolutionary party, without an executive, without a central agency, without paid officials" (ohne Execution, ohne Central-beitrag, ohne besoldete Beamte).²

At the opposite end of the country, meanwhile, another man was seeking to unify the socialist movement. He was Burnette G. Haskell, a twenty-six-year-old non-practicing attorney, Chinese-baiter, and publisher of the San Francisco *Truth*, "A Journal for the Poor," to which Albert Parsons was an occasional contributor. Restless, erratic, Haskell never stayed long with any particular cause or move-

PITTSBURGH CONGRESS

ment. Over a ten-year period he became, in turn, a socialist, a near-anarchist, a single-taxer, and a Bellamyite nationalist. To Benjamin Tucker, a stickler for principle, he was "a consummate scoundrel, with whom it is highly dangerous to have any dealings."³

A small, sallow man for whom "controversies were meat and drink," Haskell had a passion for conspiracy and dynamite which rivalled that of Most himself. "*Truth* is five cents a copy and dynamite forty cents a pound," proclaimed the masthead of his journal, which contained instructions on street-fighting and the manufacture of explosives, and which urged workers to procure arms without delay ("We have no moment to wait. Arm, I say, to the death! For revolution is upon you"). "War to the palace, peace to the cottage, death to luxurious idleness!" was the paper's ringing motto. "Our object: the reorganization of society independent of Priest, King, Capitalist, or Loafer. Our principles: every man is entitled to the full product of his own labor, and to his proportionate share of all the natural advantages of the earth."⁴

Haskell, it appears, had been contemplating a revolutionary coup in San Francisco. Among his papers is the following statement in his own writing: "Seize Mint, Armories, Sub-Treasury, Custom House, Government Steamer, Alcatraz, Presidio, newspapers." He was plotting, in addition, to lay waste the Hall of Records. A building was to be rented across the street, a tunnel dug, and dynamite planted. But the plan was never consummated. (Haskell, according to rumor, failed to appear at the appointed hour.)⁵

Haskell's claim to our attention, however, lies in his role as founder of the International Workmen's Association, an organization composed almost entirely of native American workers, which, since its formation in 1881, had gained a significant following in the Far West, where the social revolutionaries had not yet struck root. Known as the Red International, it had two main branches, the Pacific Coast Division, with headquarters in San Francisco, and the Rocky Mountain Division, with headquarters in Denver. (There was also a Mexican Division, centered in Chihuahua.) Haskell, as the driving force behind the Red International and secretary of its Pacific Coast Division, was invited to the Pittsburgh congress. Though unable to attend, he drafted an elaborate program designed to reconcile the contending socialist factions and provide a basis on which to unify the movement. He sent copies of his program to August Spies in

Chicago and Joseph Labadie in Detroit, asking that it be presented to the congress on behalf of his organization.

Far from serving as the basis of reconciliation, Haskell's plan aroused a storm of controversy. Containing a mixture of libertarian and authoritarian elements (a "hodge-podge of sense and nonsense," as *Liberty* characterized it),⁶ it called, in Blanquist fashion, for the creation of a tiny elite, "a few able, daring, heroic and noble men," as Haskell characterized them, to take the lead at the start of the revolution and "hold the helm with an iron hand until the desired results shall be accomplished." With ten such men in each city, Haskell suggested, men who "feared neither life nor death" and were prepared to employ "all the resources of science" to achieve their end, the overthrow of capitalism could be secured, and "the New Era would dawn."⁷

When Haskell's plan was introduced at a secret session of the Pittsburgh congress, which took place from October 14 to 16, it was heatedly debated. According to one source, it precipitated "a fist fight in the convention."⁸ In the end, however, it was decisively rejected, though some of its language found its way into the declaration of principles adopted by the delegates. A week before the congress, Benjamin Tucker, to whom Labadie had lent his copy, had already written it off as "perhaps the most foolishly inconsistent piece of work that ever came to our notice." It "does not reconcile in the least," complained Tucker, but "simply places Liberty and Authority side by side and arbitrarily says: 'These twain are of one flesh!'"⁹

Tucker, like Haskell, did not attend the Pittsburgh meeting. Nor did he send a representative, as he had done to the Chicago congress, where *Liberty* became the official English organ of the movement. In the interval, Tucker had shifted ground from revolutionary to evolutionary anarchism, rejecting the use of force except in the strictest cases of self-defense. He had also become an implacable opponent of collective ownership of property, a central plank in the platform of the social revolutionaries, whom he had ceased to regard as his allies. Tucker, in fact, was emerging as the foremost exponent of individualist anarchism in the United States, propagating views that were sharply at odds with those of Most and his associates, who dominated the Pittsburgh proceedings.

Most himself attended the congress, accompanied by three other New York delegates, among them Victor Drury, a French militant

who had emigrated to America following the suppression of the Paris Commune and who had welcomed Most at Cooper Union on his arrival ten months before. During the 1870s, according to George Schilling, Drury had been "the major part of the brains" among the socialists in New York. Parsons regarded him as "an eloquent speaker and one of the best informed labor men in this country."¹⁰ Parsons himself was one of the five Chicago delegates, the largest contingent at the congress, the others being Spies, Balthasar Rau, J. P. Meng, and Jacob Mikolanda, a leading Bohemian activist.

Both Parsons and Spies took a prominent part in the proceedings, delivering speeches, introducing resolutions, and helping to frame the declaration of principles. Spies, in addition, acted as secretary of the congress, as he had done in 1881. All told, twenty-six cities were represented, nearly twice as many as at the Chicago gathering, a measure of the movement's growth in the intervening years, especially since the arrival of Most. Delegates attended from Boston in the east to Omaha in the west, from Milwaukee in the north to New Orleans in the south, not to mention proxies from the Pacific Coast, British Columbia, and Mexico. Apart from Most, Spies, and Parsons, they included some of the ablest organizers and propagandists of the movement, such as Joseph Reifgraber of St. Louis, Christ Saam of Cleveland, and Joseph Frick of Pittsburgh, the host city. Also present was Labadie of Detroit, a recent convert from state socialism, who later founded the Labadie Collection of radical literature at the University of Michigan. Messages of greeting ("the eyes of the world are upon you, comrades") poured in from every part of the country and from anarchist and socialist groups throughout Europe. Although not without its share of disputation, it was an impressive and surprisingly harmonious assembly. Parsons called it "an epoch in the history of the Labor Movement of the North American Continent."¹¹

Though the congress did not officially open until October 14, nearly all of the delegates had arrived by the previous day, a Saturday. That evening a reception was held in the Turner Hall at Allegheny City, a suburb of Pittsburgh, where four years earlier Parsons had been nominated for President of the United States by the SLP national convention. The hall was decorated with red flags, and the delegates, together with some four hundred well-wishers and observers, heard a recital by the Masonic Sextet, which sang revolutionary songs for

the occasion, including a few by Most. Joseph Frick, a veteran German socialist and ardent disciple of Most's, delivered the welcoming address, followed by Victor Drury, who spoke in English, then Most himself, who spoke in German, exhorting the workers of America to close ranks and throw off the fetters of capitalism.¹²

The next morning the congress settled down to business. It soon became apparent that two distinct elements were present among the participants, elements divided by their attitude towards trade unions. The delegates from New York and other eastern cities, led by Most, declared their opposition to unions and to the struggle for immediate economic gains, such as shorter hours, higher wages, and better working conditions. Achieving limited improvements, they argued, would only blunt the revolutionary ardor of the workers, weaken their will to resist, and delay the final overthrow of capitalism. Most and his followers disdained any temporizing with the existing order, which had to be destroyed root and branch. What was more, they distrusted any large-scale organizations, like the unions, which might engender a permanent body of officials and harden into bureaucratic form.

The delegates from Chicago and the Midwest adopted a different position. Led by Parsons and Spies, they agreed with Most and his supporters about the futility of the ballot and the need for armed insurrection to overthrow the established order. Nevertheless, they remained devoted to the cause of trade unionism, to which many had been committed for several years, Parsons being a notable example. What they favored was not, however, reformist unionism, permeated, as they saw it, with the spirit of bureaucratism and compromise. Theirs was a militant, a revolutionary unionism, which sought to get at the root of labor's difficulties by changing the very basis of society. The trade union, as they viewed it, was an instrument of social revolution rather than of the amelioration of conditions within the prevailing system. It was not—at least in theory—to contend for partial and superficial benefits, but was to be satisfied with nothing less than the elimination of capitalism and its replacement by a cooperative commonwealth, in which the workers would administer the economy for their own benefit. In the struggle against capitalism, moreover, the union was to shun political action, distrust all central authority, and guard against betrayals by self-important leaders. All its faith was to rest in the direct action of the rank and file.¹³

Nor was this all. For the midwesterners the union was more than a vehicle of class struggle. It was, as Parsons described it, "an autonomous commune in the process of incubation," the "embryonic group of the future 'free society.'" ¹⁴ Following the destruction of capitalism, the union would become the nucleus of the new social system that would rise on the ashes of the old. This combination of anarchism and revolutionary unionism came to be known as the "Chicago idea," and during the next two-and-a-half years the Chicago anarchists, and especially Parsons and Spies, used it to penetrate deeply into the labor movement and to attract a large working-class following. In theory, according to the "Chicago idea," the union was not to concern itself with the struggle for piecemeal improvements. In practice, however, Parsons and Spies found themselves ignoring this self-imposed injunction, not just out of sympathy for the plight of the workers, but because they saw that only by working for immediate gains could they hope to gather mass support for their revolutionary program.

The "Chicago idea," in its essential outlines, anticipated by some twenty years the doctrine of anarcho-syndicalism, which, in a similar way, rejected centralized authority, disdained political action, and made the union the center of revolutionary struggle as well as the nucleus of the future society. Only two notable features were lacking, sabotage and the general strike, neither of which was theoretically developed until the turn of the century. This is not to say, however, that anarcho-syndicalism originated with Parsons and his associates. As early as the 1860s and 1870s the followers of Proudhon and Bakunin were proposing the formation of workers' councils designed both as a weapon of class struggle against the capitalists and as the structural basis for the libertarian millennium. A free federation of labor unions, Bakunin had written, would form "the living germs of the new social order, which is to replace the bourgeois world." In America, similar views cropped up within the Working-Men's Party of the 1870s, where the trade union was proclaimed "a great lever by which the working class will be economically emancipated."¹⁵

In the proceedings of the Pittsburgh congress the "Chicago idea" occupied a prominent place. After prolonged discussion, it was endorsed by a majority of the delegates, overriding Most's objections. In a resolution put forward by Spies, the trade unions were recognized as both "the advance guard of the coming revolution" and the

foundation of the future social order. Another resolution, introduced by Parsons, expressed support for all "progressive" unions, that is, militant unions bent on the abolition of the capitalist system, as distinct from those which clung to the "reactionary principles" of arbitration and conciliation.¹⁶ But the victory of the Chicago faction was more apparent than real. For the congress proceeded to adopt a declaration of principles that was framed entirely in the spirit of Mostian intransigence and contained no mention of trade-union action. For the sake of unity, it would seem, each side had made concessions, and for the remainder of the convention an atmosphere of harmony prevailed.

The declaration of principles, entitled *To the Workingmen of America*, was the most important piece of work to emerge from the congress. Known as the Pittsburgh Manifesto (or proclamation), it was drafted by a committee composed of five leading delegates: Most, Spies, Reifgraber, Drury, and Parsons. Most was the principal author, the document leaning heavily on his article "Our Fundamentals," published in *Freiheit* on the eve of the congress.¹⁷ Yet Parsons's hand was also visible, especially in the citation of statistics and references to Jefferson and the American Revolution, while the concluding phrases, interestingly enough, were lifted verbatim from Haskell's program for unification, which had earlier been rejected by the delegates.

An amalgam of socialist, anarchist, and other radical ideas, the Pittsburgh Manifesto embodied all the basic principles of the revolutionary socialist movement. Appealing to American as well as European traditions, it opened with a variation on a passage from the Declaration of Independence justifying the ouster of tyrannical government: "when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them [the people] under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security." Had the moment not arrived to heed this advice? demanded the framers of the Pittsburgh Manifesto. Had the American government not become an oppressor? Was it anything but "a conspiracy of the ruling classes" against the people?

Invoking both the theory of surplus value and the iron law of wages, which at the time formed part of the intellectual equipment of every socialist and anarchist, the Pittsburgh Manifesto went on to denounce the capitalist system as "unjust, insane and murder-

ous." It condemned the state, the church, and the educational system as instruments of "class domination" employed by the ruling elite to keep the workers in subjection. Indeed, the whole establishment was oppressive, so that it was necessary "to totally destroy it with and by all means." Political reform was futile, for the capitalists would not surrender their authority without a fight. It was therefore "self-evident" that the "struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie must have a violent revolutionary character"—that the one remedy for the evils of capitalism was "FORCE!" The time had come to repeat the "immemorial example" of the founding fathers: "Agitate for the purpose of organization; organize for the purpose of rebellion."

By way of summation, the manifesto listed six key objectives:

- FIRST—Destruction of the existing class rule, by all means, i.e., by energetic, relentless, revolutionary and international action.
- SECOND—Establishment of a free society based upon co-operative organization of production.
- THIRD—Free exchange of equivalent products by and between the productive organizations without commerce and profit-mongery.
- FOURTH—Organization of education on a secular, scientific and equal basis for both sexes.
- FIFTH—Equal rights for all without distinction of sex or race.
- SIXTH—Regulation of all public affairs by free contracts between the autonomous (independent) communes and associations, resting on a federalistic basis.

Borrowing from Haskell's draft program, the manifesto ended by calling on the workers to unite and throw off the yoke of wage slavery: "The day has come for solidarity. Join our ranks! Let the drum beat defiantly the roll of battle: 'Workmen of all countries unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains; you have a world to win!' Tremble, oppressors of the world! Not far beyond your purblind sight there dawns the scarlet and sable lights of JUDGMENT DAY!"¹⁸

As the official program of the social revolutionary movement, the Pittsburgh Manifesto was a landmark in the history of American radicalism. Issued simultaneously in English and German, it was translated into a number of languages, including French (by Victor Drury), Czech, Spanish, and Yiddish, and was printed and reprinted

in anarchist and socialist publications around the world. Hundreds of thousands of copies were distributed in the United States alone, and long after the congress it continued to be accepted by militant workingmen as a concise statement of their creed.¹⁹

Of more immediate consequence, the manifesto provided a basis for cooperation among the disparate groups represented at the congress, which proceeded to form themselves into a new national organization designed to replace the stillborn Revolutionary Socialistic Party. Like the London congress of July 1881, the organization adopted the name of the First International, of which it considered itself the legitimate successor. For a time the titles "International Working Men's Association" and "International Working People's Association" were used interchangeably, until the latter came to be the prevalent form. (In German the problem did not exist, as the terms were identical: Internationale Arbeiter-Association.)

Following the scheme laid down at the Chicago congress two years before, the International Working People's Association constituted itself as a loose-knit federation of groups, each of which was to contain five or more members and to enjoy full autonomy, so long as it adhered to the credo of the organization as embodied in the Pittsburgh Manifesto. In cities where there were several groups, it was recommended that a general committee be formed to secure concerted action. Such committees, however, were to have no executive powers. As an agency of record-keeping and communication among the far-flung groups, a Bureau of Information was to be created, also without executive powers, in contrast to the Marxist-dominated General Council of the First International and to the National Executive Committee of the SLP.

Three weeks after the congress, such a bureau was established in Chicago, consisting of a secretary for each of the major languages represented in the association: August Spies for English and Paul Grottkau, William Medow, and Jacob Mikolanda for German, French, and Czech. (Danish was no longer represented, as it had been in the Information Bureau of the Revolutionary Socialistic Party.) For purposes of propaganda, the IWPA was divided into nine agitational districts: Eastern States, Central States, Western States, Rocky Mountain States, Pacific Coast States, Southern States, Canada, British Columbia, and Mexico. A congress of the IWPA, according to the rules of the organization, could be summoned at any time by request of a majority of the groups.²⁰ None, however, was ever called.

Owing in part to the Haymarket incident, the Pittsburgh congress was the last.

Before concluding their work, the delegates passed two further resolutions. One extended sympathy to their fellow revolutionaries in Europe, engaged in the common struggle for emancipation. The other urged the SLP to join with them on the basis of the principles laid down in the Pittsburgh Manifesto. Two months earlier, the SLP had been invited to send representatives to the congress, but the National Executive Committee had declined, insisting that there could be no common ground between socialists and anarchists, the issues of arms and the ballot posing insurmountable barriers to unification. The SLP, however, had been rapidly losing ground to their militant rivals. Despairing of the slow methods of reform, more and more workers had been heeding the proponents of direct action and defecting to the social revolutionary camp. By 1883 membership in the SLP had shrunk to about 1,500. Even such stalwarts as Thomas Morgan and George Schilling had left for greener pastures, Schilling drifting into the Tuckerite school and Morgan retiring to Woodlawn Park, where he built a house and "raised flowers, potatoes and cabbages while Parsons and his associates raised h—."²¹

Yet another blow came in April 1883, when Philip Van Patten, who had been secretary of the party for more than five years and was one of its most capable and faithful officials, abandoned the fight. Disheartened by the endless bickering and by the deteriorating condition of the party, he suddenly disappeared, leaving behind a letter announcing his intention to commit suicide. This, as it turned out, was merely a ruse. Adopting a fictitious name, Van Patten took a minor post in the federal bureaucracy and afterwards became a merchant in Arkansas.

With Van Patten's abrupt departure, the party was in a shambles. By the time of the Pittsburgh congress, the social revolutionaries had eclipsed it in size and importance. The National Executive Committee, sticking to its decision, refused to take part in the proceedings. But when the Pittsburgh Manifesto was published, it did not seem so far from orthodox socialism as many had expected. Voices for unification were raised, and in December 1883 some of the party's most prominent members, among them Alexander Jonas, editor of the *New Yorker Volks-Zeitung*, took it upon themselves to propose a reconciliation. This was done by means of a letter to the Information Bureau in Chicago. "Reading the Proclamation of the

internationalists as adopted at the Pittsburgh convention," it asserted, "we can hardly find anything in it with which the SLP has not always agreed, except perhaps some obscure clauses of a reactionary coloring." The answer, drafted by Spies, amounted to a rebuff. Taking the position that the SLP had become an obsolete organization, Spies advised it to dissolve itself into autonomous groups and to affiliate with the IWPA in the same manner as the groups already composing it.²²

It was in these circumstances, its membership dwindling, its overtures to the social revolutionaries rebuffed, that the SLP's national convention assembled in Baltimore later the same month. It was, according to Morris Hillquit, the most dismal annual meeting in the organization's history. Only sixteen delegates attended, determined to do battle with the International. Denouncing Most as a "demagogue," indeed a demagogue with "an eye for money," they issued a proclamation to the workers of America designed as an answer to the Pittsburgh Manifesto. "We do not share the folly of the men who consider dynamite as the best means of agitation," it declared. "We know full well that a revolution must take place in the heads and in the industrial life of man before the working class can achieve lasting success."²³ The convention drew a sharp line between socialism and anarchism. Thereafter all attempts at reconciliation were abandoned as useless, and there was nothing left but war between the two camps. The breach between political and revolutionary socialism had become permanent.

7 || THE INTERNATIONAL WORKING PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION

Between the Pittsburgh congress of 1883 and the Haymarket explosion of 1886, the IWPA expanded at a rapid pace. New groups were established throughout the country, old groups increased their membership, the *Freiheit* and the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* gained in circulation, and a number of new journals were started, most notably *The Alarm* in Chicago, edited by Albert Parsons. Parsons, Spies, and others went on speaking tours through many states to enroll new workers into the organization. Out of this burst of activity a vigorous revolutionary movement took shape. Anarchism became a distinct power within American labor, particularly within its German-speaking segment.

What made the ground favorable for anarchist propaganda was a new economic crisis, setting in around the time of the Pittsburgh congress and continuing until the Haymarket incident. The depression of 1883-1886, while neither so acute nor prolonged as the depression of 1873-1878, created severe distress, filling the industrial centers with throngs of idle and destitute men. In Chicago alone, according to *The Alarm*, 34,000 were thrown out of work.¹ It was a time of misery and suffering for many, of homelessness and starvation for some. Immigration remained heavy, compounding the problem of unemployment. New arrivals crowded into the cities, where ostentatious wealth rubbed shoulders with grinding poverty. "Never before," noted the Johns Hopkins economist Richard T. Ely, "had there been seen in America such contrasts between fabulous wealth and absolute penury."²

By the winter of 1883-1884 the situation in Chicago was so alarming that the Citizens' Association mounted an investigation of living conditions in working-class neighborhoods. The resulting report told of "the wretched condition of the tenements into which thousands of workmen are huddled, the wholesale violation of all rules for

drainage, plumbing, lighting, ventilation and safety in case of fire or accident, the neglect of all laws of health, the horrible condition of sewers and outhouses, the filthy, dingy rooms into which they are crowded, the unwholesome character of their food, and the equally filthy nature of the neighboring streets, alleys, and back lots filled with decaying matter and stagnant pools."³

Joseph Gruenhut, a socialist whom the incumbent mayor, Carter Harrison, had appointed factory and tenement inspector, headed the investigating committee. Paul Grottkau, editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, went along on the first day but was so appalled by what he saw that he could not bring himself to go again. As a result, Michael Schwab, one of the future Haymarket defendants, had to cover the investigation for the paper. Schwab, too, emerged shaken. "Thousands of laborers in the city of Chicago," he declared, "live in rooms without sufficient protection from the weather, without proper ventilation, in which never a stream of sunlight flows. There are hovels where two, three and four families live in one room. How these conditions influence the health and the morals of these unfortunate sufferers, it is needless to say. And how do they live? From the ash barrels they gather half rotten vegetables; in the butcher shops they buy for a few cents offal of meat, and these precious morsels they carry home to prepare from them their meals. The dilapidated houses in which this class of laborers live need repairs very badly, but the greedy landlord waits in most cases till he is compelled by the city to have them done. Is it a wonder that diseases of all kinds kill men, women and children in such places by wholesale, especially children? Is it not horrible in a so-called civilized land where there is plenty of food and riches?"⁴

Given such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the depression should have inspired a new wave of social unrest, a spontaneous upsurge like that of the 1870s but more impregnated with radical ideas. Open struggles between labor and capital, in the form of strikes, demonstrations, and boycotts, became more and more frequent. By 1886 the number of strikers had reached 500,000, triple the average figure of the previous five years, and the number of establishments struck had nearly quadrupled.⁵ The employers, as before, enjoyed the cooperation of the authorities. Strike after strike witnessed the same police brutality and use of militia, scabs, and private detectives, not to mention the blacklist and lockout, with federal troops in the background if needed.

The anarchists, their task of recruitment facilitated by the deepening crisis, worked tirelessly to win over the discontented. Between 1883 and 1886 the IWPA issued a flood of pamphlets and leaflets and published more than a dozen newspapers and journals through which it disseminated its radical doctrines. Along with the printed word went public meetings and demonstrations. Lectures and discussions threshed over the principles of socialism and anarchism and the evils of government and capital. "Who Are the Criminals?" "The Crisis of the Workers," "The Development of Socialism," and "Authority and Autonomy" were typical subjects. Orators railed against "exploiters" and "oppressors" and foretold the dawning of a new era of brotherhood, freedom, and equality.⁶

Apart from Spies and Parsons in Chicago and Most and Drury in New York, the IWPA could boast a full complement of excellent speakers in half a dozen languages, for whom the railroads provided convenient transportation and the cities eager audiences. The strength of their radical sentiment, the fervor of their agitation, is hard to exaggerate. Thousands who listened to their speeches, as William Holmes of Chicago observed, became "imbued with their revolutionary spirit."⁷ Traveling from place to place, they spoke in beer-halls and clubhouses, on the streets and in the parks, denouncing the capitalist system and preaching the virtues of a juster life which could be obtained only through the abolition of "wage slavery." Appealing to the workers to awaken from their misery and recognize the true extent of their enslavement, they condemned the hypocrisy of the rich, their aristocratic pretensions, their amusements and dissipations. Something was fundamentally rotten in the country. The growing financial and industrial power was crushing the workers into poverty and depriving them of their dignity and freedom. Pointing to abuses at every hand, they counseled the workers to distrust politicians and representatives of all kinds and to use their own strength and intelligence, their own initiative and efforts, to achieve emancipation. They sought, above all, to inspire their listeners with the vision of a new society, based on individual sovereignty and mutual cooperation, in which free men and women would work willingly for themselves and each other instead of unwillingly for a capitalist employer. In such a society, they insisted, there would be no need for coercion and therefore no need for the state.

Street parades and mass outdoor demonstrations, with red and black banners and bands playing the "Marseillaise" and other rev-

olutionary airs, were the most dramatic form of advertisement at this stage of the movement. A procession of workingmen, organized by the International in January 1885, marched to Fountain Square in downtown Cincinnati, carrying the "Red Flag of the Commune" and placards reading "Bread or Blood" and "Order and Empty Stomachs Can Never Be Allies," as well as a black flag inscribed "No Quarter."⁸ Similar demonstrations were common in Chicago and other cities. By the same token, the International organized picnics, concerts, dances, and entertainments of various kinds, imparting a new revolutionary content to traditional social activities. "Those were momentous times," recollected William Holmes. "Days and nights of agitation in out-of-the-way places under great difficulties, by heroic men and women buoyed up by enthusiastic devotion to a great cause; speeches delivered from piles of salt barrels or dry-goods boxes to great crowds of anxious, hungry, almost homeless men and women; 'Thanksgiving parades' through mud and slush, the march of the have-nots through the streets where the do-naughts dwell; solitary street-corner propaganda away into the midnight hours; meetings held in holes and corners—to avoid rent or to reach the proletaire in their own dens, their homes; great halls filled weekly to overflowing by multitudes who came to hear 'glad tidings.'"⁹

In this way, through their press and meetings, their demonstrations and processions, the anarchists carried their message to the workers. Nor were their efforts unavailing. From 1883 to 1886 the movement picked up momentum. Groups of the International multiplied from year to year, and their membership increased steadily. Nine persons sufficed to form a group (formerly the number had been only five), and each group was autonomous, conducting its work "in its own way," according to guidelines laid down in 1886, provided that it remained faithful to the Pittsburgh Manifesto. Most groups had a secretary and a treasurer (elected as a rule for six-month terms) but no permanent officials. Their primary function was that of propaganda, in addition to "the obtaining of additional members, the spread of economic information, the organization and arming of the working people, both men and women," in their particular localities.¹⁰

It is not easy to determine how many Internationalists there were during this period. The records of the Bureau of Information have not been preserved, and the sources from which we must gauge the

numerical strength of the movement—lists of groups published in anarchist newspapers and estimates made by participants and other contemporaries—are unreliable. To compound the problem, some of the groups were short-lived, surviving barely a few months, while others fused or divided and are consequently difficult to trace. Furthermore, none of the lists that have come down to us is accurate or complete. At the same time, they give an inflated picture by including ephemeral groups as well as armed sections and singing societies whose membership overlapped with that of the regular affiliates. One must distinguish, moreover, between active members, who joined the association and took part in its meetings and demonstrations, and sympathizers, who read anarchist literature and followed the movement's activities without directly participating in them. "It is very, very difficult to arrive at anything like a correct approximation in regard to the strength of our movement," wrote August Spies to Professor Ely in November 1885, when the International stood at its zenith. "Our organization may be compared with an overflowing river. The entire country is submerged and you [can] hardly say where the 'bed' (*Flussbett*) begins and where it ends."¹¹

Spies himself estimated the number of active members at between ten and twelve thousand. This was, however, too high, the actual figure being less than half as many. Starting with about two thousand in the fall of 1883, when the IWPA was established, it climbed to perhaps five thousand by the fall of 1885. At that time the Bureau of Information reported the total number of groups to be 115, while *The Alarm* listed 86, all "in flourishing condition."¹² There were, in actual fact, about a hundred groups, with an average membership of forty or fifty, though some had more than a hundred members and others as few as ten (such as the group organized by Dr. Mary Herma Aikin in Grinnell, Iowa). In the fall of 1885, when the economy showed signs of recovery, membership in the International appears to have leveled off, so that in January 1886 the number of groups listed in *The Alarm* was the same as in the previous October. A plateau had evidently been reached and was maintained until the Haymarket incident.

At its height, then, from the fall of 1885 to the spring of 1886, the International had some five thousand members, along with perhaps three times as many sympathizers and supporters. Groups were to be found in nearly fifty cities and towns, concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest but reaching as far south as New Orleans and as

far west as Denver and San Francisco, where they competed, in the words of *The Alarm*, with "the so-called International owned by Haskell."¹³ The centers of the movement were New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, and other industrial cities with large working-class and immigrant populations. But groups were formed in such small towns as Huron, Dakota Territory, Muskegon, Michigan, and Scammonville, Kansas, and in the mining settlements of Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, following an evangelical tour by Albert Parsons. In the fall of 1885, moreover, a group of farm laborers was organized at Benton Harbor, Michigan, apparently the only one of its kind.¹⁴

Immigrants constituted the overwhelming majority of the members. For many recent settlers, the impulse to escape the Old World and start afresh in the New had foundered on the hardships that confronted them. America, the land of opportunity and promise, became the land of disappointment and despair. The sudden crowding into slums, the hard conditions of work, the uprooting from family and village life, the enforced pauperization and proletarianization combined to drive them into the anarchist fold. Some had taken part in the socialist movement in Europe, and they brought with them a greater sense of class struggle and revolutionary tradition than American workers normally possessed. They brought, too, as will be seen, the characteristic disease of every political emigration: sectarianism and factional strife.

Of the immigrants within the International, Germans (including Austrians and German Swiss) comprised the largest segment, though there were many Czechs, Scandinavians, and Britons, to say nothing of other nationalities. At the peak of the movement, in fact, the number of German anarchists in the United States probably exceeded that in Germany itself. Nine of the fourteen newspapers published by the International between 1883 and 1886 were in the German language, one of them, the *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung*, a daily. Of the rest, two were in English, two in Czech, and one in Danish.

Typically, a large city might have two or three German groups, one Bohemian group, and one American group. (The American groups were actually English-speaking bodies which included, besides native Americans, immigrants from Britain, Ireland, and other countries.) In all, there were eleven Bohemian and eleven American groups in early 1886, as compared with more than seventy German groups.

Here and there, in addition, one might find a Russian group (as in Pittsburgh), an Italian group (in New York), or a French group (in St. Louis).¹⁵ Whatever their country of origin, however, the adherents saw themselves as members of an international movement, and they sought to break down the barriers that divided one nationality from another. Not, one might add, without result. Through combined rallies, demonstrations, and social occasions, contacts between natives and immigrants steadily increased, so that the IWPA was, to a noticeable degree, beginning to live up to its title.

Chicago, throughout this period, remained the principal stronghold of the movement, with the deepest roots, the most active press, and the largest number of members and groups. It was here, in 1881, that the first national gathering had taken place. Chicago, moreover, had sent more delegates to the Pittsburgh congress than any other city. The most capable and intelligent leaders, with the exception of Johann Most, were here, too, above all Parsons and Spies. Sensitive, sincere men, extravagant in everything they said and did, they organized groups, arranged demonstrations, published papers, raised funds, and mingled and talked with workers all over the city. Even more, by conducting lecture tours throughout the East and Middle West, they were able to extend their influence beyond the confines of their own bailiwick. Chicago, as a result, became the Mecca of the anarchist movement, to which adherents from all over the country looked for advice and support. It was the seat of the Bureau of Information, and letters poured in from every corner, some of which were published in *The Alarm* and *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the International's chief media of communication. Parsons and Spies, as editors of these journals and secretaries of the Information Bureau, answered countless inquiries and dispatched large quantities of literature to members and potential recruits. Only Most himself could claim a comparable role in building up a movement of such vitality. Not without reason did George Schilling refer to the "wonderful activity" of the Chicago Internationalists, in particular of Parsons and Spies.¹⁶

Chicago, with its crowded immigrant population and long history of labor unrest, was fertile soil for anarchist propaganda and organization. In no other American city was class demarcation sharper or the gap between the rich and poor more conspicuous. In no other city was the reputation for police brutality more notorious or the

economic crisis more sorely felt. Nor, it might be added, did the press anywhere else denounce with more vehemence all agitators and subversives or more strenuously uphold the right of property and the exigency of preserving law and order, by force if necessary. Given these circumstances, it is little wonder that the rise of the Chicago IWPA should have occurred with such unparalleled swiftness. By the fall of 1885 the city could boast fifteen active groups with nearly one thousand members, about a fifth of the national total.¹⁷ To this must be added a large number of sympathizers, as many as five or six thousand in all. The majority, as in the country at large, were Germans, but there were also many Czechs and other Europeans, as well as a vigorous American Group, of which Parsons was the driving spirit. Scandinavians, while still in evidence, were rapidly waning. By 1884, for reasons not immediately apparent, they were no longer represented in the Bureau of Information, and by 1886 *Den Nye Tid* had ceased to appear.

Because of the large number of groups in Chicago, it was one of the few cities (St. Louis was another) to have a General Committee to coordinate activities. This committee, in accordance with the rules laid down at the Pittsburgh congress, functioned solely as an advisory body. Its members, it is worth noting, included four of the eight Haymarket defendants, Albert Parsons, August Spies, Michael Schwab, and Oscar Neebe, in addition to Balthasar Rau and Anton Hirschberger, both of whom sat also on the Information Bureau, together with Parsons and Spies. Both the General Committee and the Information Bureau held their meetings at 107 Fifth Avenue, the nerve center of the Chicago movement, where *The Alarm* and *Arbeiter-Zeitung* were published, and where the International maintained a library of works on economic and social subjects, of which Schwab was in charge until 1885.

In Chicago, as elsewhere, the International was almost exclusively a working-class organization, with only an occasional professional in its ranks, such as Dr. James D. Taylor, a member of the American Group. Through its propaganda and other activities, the idea of labor solidarity took on flesh and life, and anarchism assumed the character of a genuine class movement. Its ranks included both skilled and unskilled workers and workers in both large and small enterprises. The leaders, however, were mostly independent artisans and tradesmen. Of the eight Haymarket defendants, Parsons and Fischer were printers, Spies an upholsterer turned editor, Schwab a former

bookbinder, Fielden a self-employed teamster, Lingg a carpenter, Engel the owner of a toy store, and Neebe the part owner of a yeast company. Nearly all of them had been reared in a rural and preindustrial culture, Parsons in Texas, the Germans in villages and towns. None were industrial workers in the proper sense, although they championed and helped organize this class, to which some (notably Fielden) had belonged in the past.

Their occupations, it should be noted, were not untypical of the anarchists of this period, especially the leadership element. Skilled artisans and craftsmen, confronted by the emergence of industrial capitalism and the mechanization of labor, formed the vanguard of most anarchist organizations of the late nineteenth century, in Europe as well as America. In the decades following the Civil War, the development of large-scale industry was a dominant feature of the American economy, accompanied by profound changes in the structure of society and in the methods of production and distribution. After the depression of 1873-1878, the introduction of machinery took place at an unprecedented rate. By the mid-1880s the factory system had become general, and the grip of mass production was firmly fastened upon the country.

Anarchism, to a large extent, was a reaction against these developments. For many craftsmen and skilled workers, the transformation of America into an industrial society threatened their accustomed way of life, not to mention their vision of a just social order. Samuel Fielden, who himself had labored as a child in the cotton mills of Lancashire, was sharply critical of the emergent system, and he sought, in countless speeches to working-class audiences, to "call their attention to the fact that by the introduction of labor-saving machinery and the subdivision of labor less men were continually needed, more productions produced, and their chance to work decreased." On one occasion, in March 1886, he went to Pullman, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago created by George Pullman, the inventor of the sleeping car, as a model industrial community. To Fielden, however, it was a "model slave pen," a company town in new dress. Only by removing the yoke of capitalism, he told its residents, might labor benefit from the advantages of modern technology.¹⁸

For other Chicago anarchists, deeply rooted in the traditional crafts, there was a nostalgia for the vanishing agrarian society of the past, before it was corrupted by the money values of manufacturers and

financiers. Thus did Michael Schwab, the former bookbinder from Bavaria, mourn the transformation of the farmer into an industrial laborer: "Instead of the melodious tinkling of the bells of his cows, he now hears the task bell of the factory, that calls him to work. Instead of the splashing or roaring of the creeks and cataracts, the whispering of the air in the dark-green forests, he is treated to the clattering of noisy, busy machines. Stout, big-chested, strong-limbed and with rosy cheeks, he fell into the power of enslaving capital. Alas! it lasts not long till the cheeks lose their color, the limbs their strength and the freeman his independence."¹⁹

Laments such as this do not mean, however, that anarchism was inherently anti-industrial, or that the anarchists wished to turn the clock back to an age of independent farmers and craftsmen, though some would perhaps have liked nothing better. To say that the anarchists rejected modern society is to put the matter too simply. Their response to the rise of large-scale production was by no means merely to affirm the preindustrial values on which they had been reared. Nor did they reject technical innovation. For all their romantic yearnings, they welcomed new inventions that would relieve men of tedious labor and allow time for cultural and intellectual pursuits. Yet they wished to preserve the advantages of machinery within the context of a smaller and more natural society. What they resisted was the mammoth scale of industrial institutions, the excessive division of labor, and the system by which the machines were owned and administered. Under capitalism, Parsons had argued during the 1877 strike, the new technology was not being applied to benefit the working population but to intensify their exploitation. "We don't fight machinery," he repeated in 1886. "We don't oppose the thing. It is only the manner and methods of employing them that we object to. That is all. It is the manipulations of these things in the interests of a few, it is the monopolization of them that we object to. We desire that all the forces of nature, all the forces of society, of the gigantic strength which has resulted from the combined intellect and labor of the ages of the past shall be turned over to man, and made his servant, his obedient slave forever. This is the object of Socialism."²⁰

Fielden expressed it in similar terms: "Improved machinery—I claim now what I have claimed all along in the discussion of this industrial problem—is calculated to benefit all classes of humanity and society. But it is the use to which they are put. If they can be

bought by one person, so that he can hire labor cheap, or dispense with labor, they are a benefit to no person save the man who has money enough to purchase a machine."²¹

Equally deplorable, in the eyes of the anarchists, was the growing subdivision of labor, with its corrosive effects on the human spirit. Minute specialization, argued Parsons and his associates, benefited only the employer, while promoting boredom and frustration among the workers, accentuating the master-slave relationship, and reinforcing the invidious distinction between manual and intellectual work. Under the capitalist system, the workers were merely hired hands, cogs in an intricate machine, receiving little satisfaction from the monotonous, repetitious drudgery they performed. "We have lost sight of the pleasure of work," was how *The Alarm* succinctly put it.²² Pride of workmanship, or even a simple understanding of where one stood in the productive process, had no place in the new scheme of things, so that the workers were increasingly estranged from their labor, from themselves, and from their fellow men.

Anarchism, then, was not a protest against industrialism as much as a demand that it be humanized and organized to public advantage. Determined not to be reduced to paid menials, to machine-tenders assigned to a tiny part of the productive process, the anarchists sought to replace capitalism with an economic system that valued personal autonomy and the creativity of labor. They envisioned a decentralized, egalitarian society based on the voluntary cooperation of free individuals, a society without government or property, without hunger or want, in which men and women would direct their own affairs unimpeded by any authority. In such a society, the worker, without sacrificing the gains of modern technology, would regain the lost joy in his labor and the dignity of being his own master. No longer would he be treated as chattel or as a marketable commodity.

Such an ideology exerted a powerful appeal. Many of the recruits to the IWPA came from handicrafts occupations—metals, woodworking, tailoring, cigarmaking—which were being absorbed into the factory system and, in some cases, replaced by machines. This was especially true of the metal crafts, within which the anarchists won their strongest following. Gustav Belz, a leader of the Chicago metal workers, sat on the International's General Committee, and large numbers of the rank and file joined the anarchist-dominated Federative Union of Metal Workers of America, with headquarters in

St. Louis (Joseph Reifgraber serving as president) and branches in New York and Philadelphia as well as in Chicago itself.²³ The majority of the new adherents seem to have worked in small shops, but a growing number were employed in the big, up-to-date factories, such as the Pullman railroad car works and the McCormick and Deering agricultural machinery plants, where Parsons and his comrades were often called upon to speak.

The International, however, attracted not only skilled workers and craftsmen, but also the semi-skilled, the unskilled, and the unemployed. With the rapid introduction of machinery, these groups had been swelling in numbers, replenished by a shift in population from country to city and by the waves of immigrants from Europe. Combined with the depression, the influx into the factories of semi-skilled and unskilled workers, weak in bargaining power because they were so easily replaced, had a disastrous effect upon wages. In 1884 the average cuts amounted to 15 percent. The following year they went even deeper, arousing a wave of anger and frustration. Terence V. Powderly, the leader of the Knights of Labor, noted in April 1885 that "a deep-rooted feeling of discontent pervades the masses," and that "the army of the discontented is gathering fresh recruits day by day."²⁴

Owing to the mounting crisis, the unskilled and unemployed were drawn to the International in increasing numbers. Because their lot was so hard and their poverty so bitter, the agitation of the anarchists spoke directly to their hearts and articulated their deepest grievances. Many were instinctive rebels, ignorant of anarchist theory or ideals, whom misfortune and despair had made susceptible to extreme solutions. They joined the International because the total and immediate revolution that the anarchists promised seemed the only possibility of improving their desperate condition. Others saw anarchism simply as a more radical version of socialism, sanctioning the methods of conspiracy and direct action from which the SLP and other moderate groups recoiled.

The International endeavored to rally these elements—the unskilled and unorganized, the unwanted and unemployed—and to make their voices heard. It sought to fill them with a sense of their grievances and with a consciousness of their own power. It appealed to the poorest of the poor—"Les Misérables," *The Alarm* called them—living on the margin of society and waging a desperate struggle for survival. Gripped by visions of the despised and rejected—

the tramps, the down-and-out vagrants, the *Lumpenproletariat* of the urban slums—rising from the lower depths to exterminate their oppressors, the anarchists regarded these and other outcasts as allies in the social revolution. "Let every dirty, lousy tramp arm himself with a revolver or knife," the *Chicago Tribune* reported Lucy Parsons as saying, "and lay in wait on the steps of the palaces of the rich and stab or shoot the owners as they come out. Let us kill them without mercy, and let it be a war of extermination and without pity. Let us devastate the avenues where the wealthy live as Sheridan devastated the beautiful valley of the Shenandoah."²⁵

Thus, attracted by the rhetoric of violence and by hopes of immediate redemption, a growing segment of the Chicago working class—skilled and unskilled, employed and unemployed—flocked to the International. A climax was reached with the disruption of the Amalgamated Trades and Labor Assembly, the city's politically oriented central labor body, when, in late 1883, a dissident faction of the Cigar Makers' Union withdrew and formed the Progressive Cigar Makers' Union. In February 1884 the Progressive Union held a mass meeting and, under the tutelage of August Spies and Paul Grottkau, proclaimed that "the only means whereby the emancipation of mankind can be brought about is the open rebellion of the robbed class in all parts of the country against the existing economic and political institutions."²⁶

Having thus asserted its solidarity with the anarchist tendency, the same union took the initiative in organizing a new central labor council. In June 1884 it called upon all unions in the city to secede from the Trades Assembly and to form a Central Labor Union with a revolutionary policy. Four German unions answered the call—the metal workers, the butchers, the cabinetmakers, and the carpenters and joiners—and the Central Labor Union was duly established. In October 1884 the new body adopted a declaration of principles, asserting that all land is a social heritage, that all wealth is created by labor, that between labor and capital there can be no harmony, and that every worker ought to "cut loose from all capitalist political parties and to devote his energy to his trades or labor union," as well as to "stand ready to resist the encroachment of the ruling class upon our liberties."²⁷

The conversion of workers from political to direct actionists, from reformists to revolutionaries, must be credited to several factors, among them police brutality, political corruption, the hard line adopted

by employers, and the talents of the IWPA spokesmen. Most important, however, was the worsening economic situation. As the depression deepened, the Central Labor Union went from strength to strength, spearheading the creation of new trade unions and drawing away existing unions from the control of the Trades Assembly. In October 1885 thirteen unions already belonged to the new organization, while nineteen were affiliated with its rival. By the eve of Haymarket, in the spring of 1886, the Central Labor Union had become the dominant force in the Chicago labor movement, boasting twenty-four unions, among which were the eleven largest in the city.²⁸

From its inception, the Central Labor Union was closely tied with the IWPA. Not only did it hold its business meetings at Greif's Hall on West Lake Street, a popular IWPA gathering place, but it joined with the International in sponsoring picnics, rallies, and lectures, in which Spies, Parsons, and their colleagues took a leading role. Still more, the membership of the organizations overlapped to a large extent. For example, of the 400-odd members of the International Carpenters and Joiners, a Central Labor Union affiliate, nearly all were anarchists or anarchist sympathizers.²⁹

Both organizations, moreover, insisted that the labor movement must be revolutionary in character, that its mission of emancipating the workers could be accomplished only by eliminating the capitalist system and reorganizing society on new foundations. By doing so, they incurred the wrath of the Trades Assembly, which accused them of preaching "arson and murder." The militants lashed back at the Assembly for condoning "wage slavery" and "slow starvation" in an effort to curry favor with the bosses. "The social war has come," cried *The Alarm*, "and those who are not with us are against us."³⁰

As tempers flared on both sides, the International challenged the Assembly to a public debate. Some 1,500 people packed the Aurora Turner Hall to witness the fireworks. Nor were they disappointed. Parsons, who spoke first for the International, did not mince his words as he dismissed reformism as a delusion and proclaimed that the "beast of property" was hounding the workers to death and therefore had to be destroyed and replaced by a free society based on "the co-operative organization of production." Fielden, who followed Parsons, ridiculed the notion, put forward by the Trades Assembly, of a harmony of interests between labor and capital. "When

a burglar enters the house," Fielden said, "they tap him on the shoulder and say, 'let's us argue this thing, let's harmonize: take seventy-five per cent of what I have but leave me the rest.' We Socialists say to him, 'lay it down.' We have been arguing long enough with the capitalists, and they won't lay it down. The time is coming when they will be compelled to lay it down."³¹

As these speeches indicate, the International and the Central Labor Union differed from the Trades Assembly in being militant organizations dedicated to overthrowing the established order. They had no truck with legislative solutions. "The Central Labor Union, unlike its rival, the Trades Assembly, steers clear of politics and politicians," declared *The Alarm*.³² The Assembly, for its own part, clung to its moderate course. Arranging a Labor Day parade for September 7, 1885, it secured Mayor Harrison and Congressman Martin Foran as speakers and prohibited the anarchists from taking part. Denouncing this "contemptible flunkkeyism," the International and the Central Labor Union hastily arranged a meeting of their own, which assembled in Market Square on Sunday, September 6. After preliminaries, during which Spies delivered an oration in German and the Socialistic Male Chorus sang the "Red Banner," the participants formed themselves in ranks and, with Neebe as marshal and Parsons at his side, marched through downtown Chicago. First in line came a contingent of women in decorated wagons, which bore the slogans: "Down with Government, God and Gold" and "Our Civilization: The Bullet and Policeman's Club." As usual, they ended up at the Ogden's Grove picnic grounds, where Parsons delivered an impassioned speech. Addressing a crowd of several thousand, he decried "the enslavement of the producers to the things which their labor creates." Shall 5 percent of the population, he asked, be allowed to possess the world's wealth? The capitalist, by appropriating the means of life for his exclusive enjoyment, was "a usurper, a thief, and a murderer." The exploitation of man by man must cease, Parsons exclaimed. "To this we are pledged. We are revolutionists. We fight for the destruction of the system of wage-slavery. To the despised, destitute, disinherited of the earth, anarchy offers love, peace and plenty. Statute law, constitutions and government are at war with nature and the inalienable rights of man, and social revolution is the effort of nature to restore its equilibrium. The claim of capital to profit, interest or rent is a robber claim, enforced by piratical methods. Let robbers and pirates meet the fate they deserve! Against

them there is but one recourse, force! Agitate, organize, revolt! Proletarians of the world unite! We have nothing to lose but our chains; we have a world to win! Lead on the Red Flag, the sign of labor's emancipation—the emblem of redeemed humanity; lead on to liberty or death!" With this Parsons shook out the folds of a red silk banner and waved it aloft. The crowd burst forth in cheers, the band struck up the "Marseillaise," and all joined in singing their revolutionary anthem.³³

To moderate labor leaders, in Chicago and elsewhere, the mounting talk of revolution was deeply disturbing. Within the Central Labor Union, as Samuel Gompers later remarked, "dynamite became a familiar thought. Those of us who were trying to develop a constructive trade-union movement were exceedingly apprehensive of the reckless swing toward force."³⁴ Yet a rising number of workers were defecting to the radical camp, in response, more than anything else, to the failure of both political action and conventional trade unionism to deal with the worsening depression. More and more workers were coming to regard direct action as the only answer to an ineffectual ballot, corrupt politicians, and the use of police, militia, and hired thugs in the suppression of strikes and demonstrations.

A large proportion of the defectors came from the Socialistic Labor Party, whole sections of which went over to the International. No fewer than seven of the eight Haymarket defendants had been members of the SLP, the sole exception being Lings, who did not come to America until 1885, after the split had become final. By 1884 the party was barely clinging to life. Johann Most, with his characteristic sarcasm, called it "a cadaver that must be buried so that it might not offend the nose of the public."³⁵

As a result of the depression, however, the SLP regained some of its former strength, so that the struggle with the anarchists persisted. Vigorous newspaper controversies and public discussions were the order of the day. The most notable of the latter was a debate between Johann Most and Paul Grottkau, held in Chicago on May 24, 1884. Grottkau, as editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, had been an articulate figure in the social revolutionary movement and, having attended the Pittsburgh congress, a charter member of the International. At heart, however, he had remained a state socialist and was unable to follow the evolution of the International towards anarchism. Re-

signing from the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, he returned to the SLP and moved from Chicago to Milwaukee.

The debate between Grottkau and Most took place in Steinmueller's Hall, a popular socialist meeting place at 45 North Clark Street. The theme was "Anarchism or Communism?" and Balthasar Raud delivered the opening statement. It was a well-matched contest, both opponents being fluent speakers and thoroughly versed in radical theory. For Grottkau anarchism and communism were "antagonistic principles," the former representing individualism, the latter solidarity. Most countered that, not only were they perfectly compatible, but that true communism implied local autonomy and personal freedom. Ably and intelligently conducted, the debate was transcribed by a stenographer and published in pamphlet form by the General Committee of the Chicago IWPA.³⁶ Sold by *Arbeiter-Zeitung* carriers at ten cents a copy, it had a wide circulation and helped to sharpen the division between the two schools.

Over the next few years, socialist and anarchist papers were filled with articles on the relative merits of the contending movements. Public debates of the subject were frequent, and feelings ran high on both sides. At a meeting in New York the police were called in after a fistfight erupted, and Justus Schwab was arrested for inciting to riot.³⁷ As part of the SLP campaign against the rising militant tide, special lecture tours were arranged, and Alexander Jonas and other party spokesmen went around the country visiting industrial centers seeking to expose the weaknesses of anarchist doctrine and to buoy up the discouraged socialists. Leaflets and brochures were printed under the auspices of the National Executive Committee and distributed in thousands of copies. A notable example was *Socialism and Anarchism: Antagonistic Opposites*, in which Jonas proclaimed the members of his party to be "the implacable enemies of all anarchism."³⁸

As moderate or politically minded socialists like Grottkau returned to the SLP fold, the IWPA became a more uniformly anarchist organization. Adopting an increasingly militant stance, it became, for a brief period, the most dynamic labor body in America. Its unique achievement lay in creating a working-class movement that was genuinely revolutionary, one that refused to accept capitalism as a permanent feature of American life. It helped the workers to organize their forces and taught them the rudiments of social action. Through its processions and demonstrations it aroused public con-

cern about conditions in the slums and factories, while at the same time imbuing the unskilled and unemployed with a sense of solidarity and of their worth as human beings. When strikes occurred in any section of the country, it gave the participants moral and financial support, organized protests in their behalf, sent speakers and observers into the strike area, and reported on events in its press.

Such was the case in the summer of 1884, when four thousand coal miners in the Hocking Valley of Ohio walked out in protest against a reduction in wages. Scab labor, consisting mostly of recent immigrants, were brought in, along with Pinkertons and militia to protect them. The strike attracted wide attention. August Spies went to the scene for the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, while *The Alarm* denounced the mine owners as "capitalistic cannibals." After six months of turbulence, the strike was defeated, but two new groups of the International had been organized, one German, the other American.³⁹

In the spring of 1885, another big strike occurred, this time among the quarrymen of Lemont, Lockport, and Joliet, Illinois, involving some three thousand workers. Once again the dispute centered on a cut in wages, and once again the employers brought in scabs and detectives to break the strike. When matters threatened to get out of hand, Governor Richard J. Oglesby, who was to preside over the Haymarket executions, sent in four companies of state militia, armed with rifles, revolvers, and a Gatling gun, to maintain order. On May 4, 1885, the militia opened fire on a group of unarmed strikers in Lemont, killing at least two and wounding several more, while men and women were clubbed and bayoneted in the streets.

In Chicago the American Group of the International protested against the massacre, and on May 5 Parsons reported from Lemont on the situation for *The Alarm*. That evening he was asked to address a meeting of strikers. When he advised them to organize to defend their rights, a voice called out: "We can't organize. The bosses would break it up, they did it before. It would not be allowed. They would starve us out and break it up." "Then you are slaves," Parsons replied.⁴⁰ As in the Hocking Valley, the strike in the quarries was defeated and the men forced to go back on the owners' terms.

The years from 1884 to 1886 saw a rash of similar strikes—among the switchmen of East St. Louis, Illinois, the timbermen of the Saginaw Valley in Michigan, the cotton spinners of Fall River, Massachusetts, the plumbers and bricklayers of New York City, the carpet weavers and shoemakers of Philadelphia, and the railroad workers

of the southwestern lines of Jay Gould, who boasted that he could "hire one half of the working class to kill the other half." Nearly all were directed against reductions in wages and for the right of the workmen to organize. The employers fought back with every weapon at their command: lockouts, blacklists, scabs, armed guards, local police, and state militia. All of these strikes drew national attention, and all were reported in the anarchist press, for which a special target was the employment of Pinkertons, those "banditti of armed outlaws," *The Alarm* branded them, "under a chief ready to cut throats in the service of monopoly."⁴¹

In Chicago itself, however, the police remained the principal villain. During a streetcar strike in the summer of 1885, not only were the strikers themselves attacked and beaten, but even nonstriking workers and businessmen who got in the way. The man responsible for this was Captain John Bonfield, commander of the Desplaines Street station, who less than a year later was to shoulder much of the burden for the violence in Haymarket Square. Known as "Black Jack" Bonfield, he had made his reputation and earned his promotions by cracking skulls. A "large, powerful, resolute, ruthless man," in the description of Charles Edward Russell, a Chicago-based reporter for the *New York World*, Bonfield was prone to violent behavior and obviously sadistic. He was "without tact or discretion or sympathy," as Mother Jones recalled him, a "most brutal believer in suppression as the method to settle industrial unrest."⁴²

At no time was this more apparent than during the 1885 streetcar strike. Contrary to Mayor Harrison's orders, Bonfield ordered his men into action, and they clubbed and beat everyone in sight, including a number of store owners who had stepped outside to see what was happening. According to *The Alarm*, one of the mayor's sons was among the victims. Charles Edward Russell, who witnessed the attack, saw "the clubs descending right and left like flails, and men falling before them, often frightfully injured."⁴³ Bonfield himself assaulted a group of bystanders near the corner of Western Avenue and Madison Street, then attacked several other people, including a sixty-five-year-old man, whom Bonfield ordered to "fall back," then clubbed before the man could move.

The next day, July 3, the scene was repeated. A crew of gas company workers was digging up the street when a group of strikers and sympathizers began throwing loose dirt onto the streetcar tracks. Bonfield had the gas workers arrested. They were thrown into a